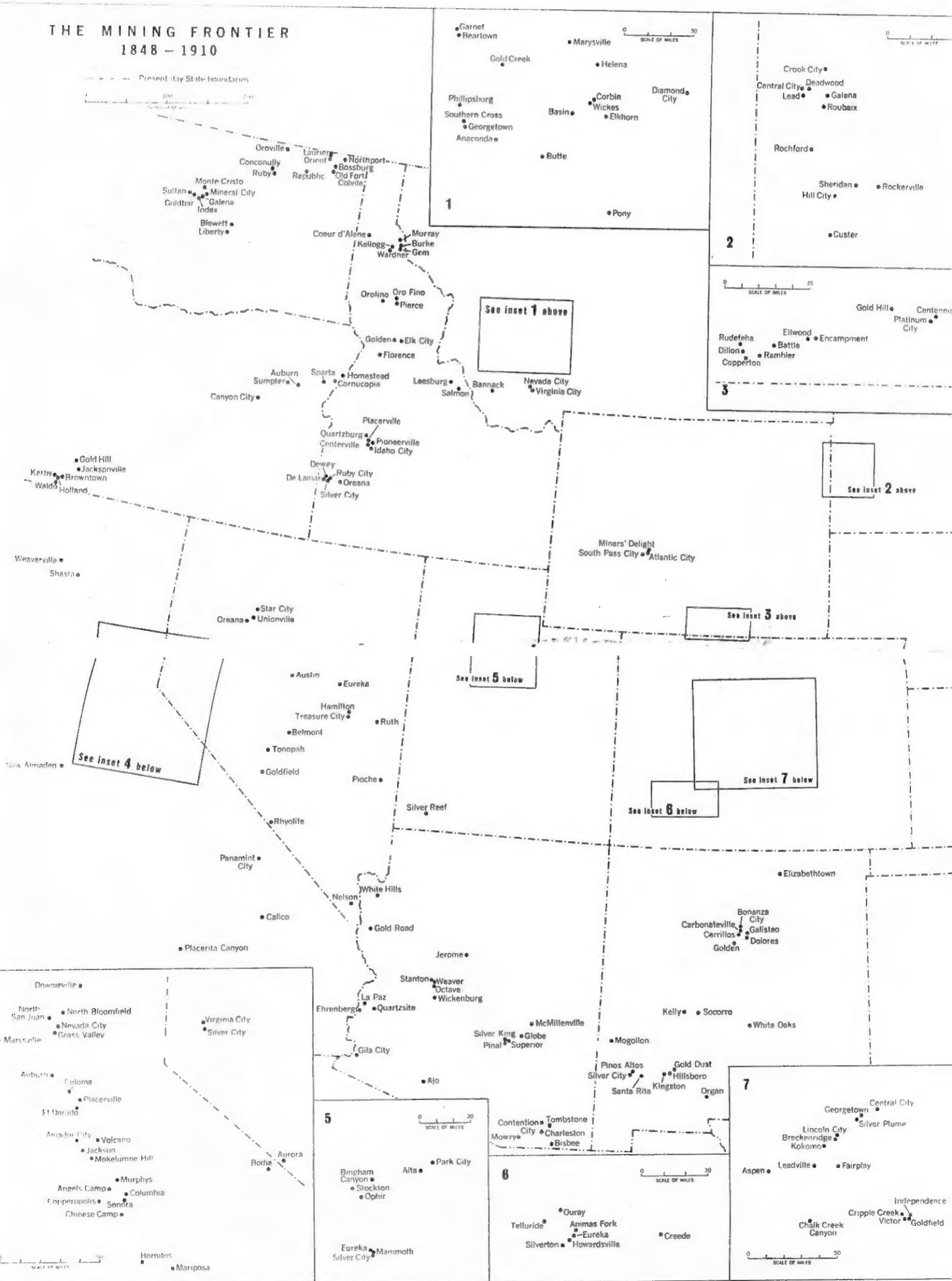


THE MINING FRONTIER  
1848 - 1910





Sam Brannan, Mormon elder, brought news of James Marshall's gold strike to San Francisco. Two years earlier he had led a large group of Mormon settlers to the city. Courtesy, California Historical Society.

wives, sons are parting with their mothers, and bachelors are abandoning their comforts; all are rushing head over heels toward the El Dorado on the Pacific." Whenever and wherever men congregated that winter the talk was of California and the riches to be found there.

#### ROUTES TO THE GOLDFIELDS

The gold seekers used four principal routes to California, two each by sea and land. Easterners mainly utilized the sea routes, and residents of the Mississippi Valley and southerners the land routes. For half a century "Boston" ships had been rounding Cape Horn to trade with California, and by 1849 some of the hazards of the journey had been eliminated. But the 18,000-mile voyage required 6 to 8 months—a long and tedious trip for excited forty-niners. Nevertheless in 1849 about 15,000 of them, embarking from Northeast ports, used this route.

#### Historical Background

The second water route was the Isthmus of Panama. In 1848 at each side of the isthmus the River and an overland route were hazardous undertakings. Pack animals, were thieves and actions unpredictable. It took a heavy toll of lives. Forty-niners milled about the route, the crew deserting to the Panama route usually towards, however, only half in 1849 as over the Cape.

The most popular was the central or southern trail. Volume X of this series followed the Platte River across the Great Basin, to the Pacific slope. This Valley residents than the A wagon and oxen, sufficient the average farmer already extensive preparations for

Tens of thousands of towns—Independence, St. waited until the grass at the stock. Then the great climbed steadily until the down to the Great Basin was so deadly as plodding forgot that annoyance when ing wagons and oxen over rope down precipitous

Other gold seekers, especially the southern trails. Draw west Texas trails, the cl

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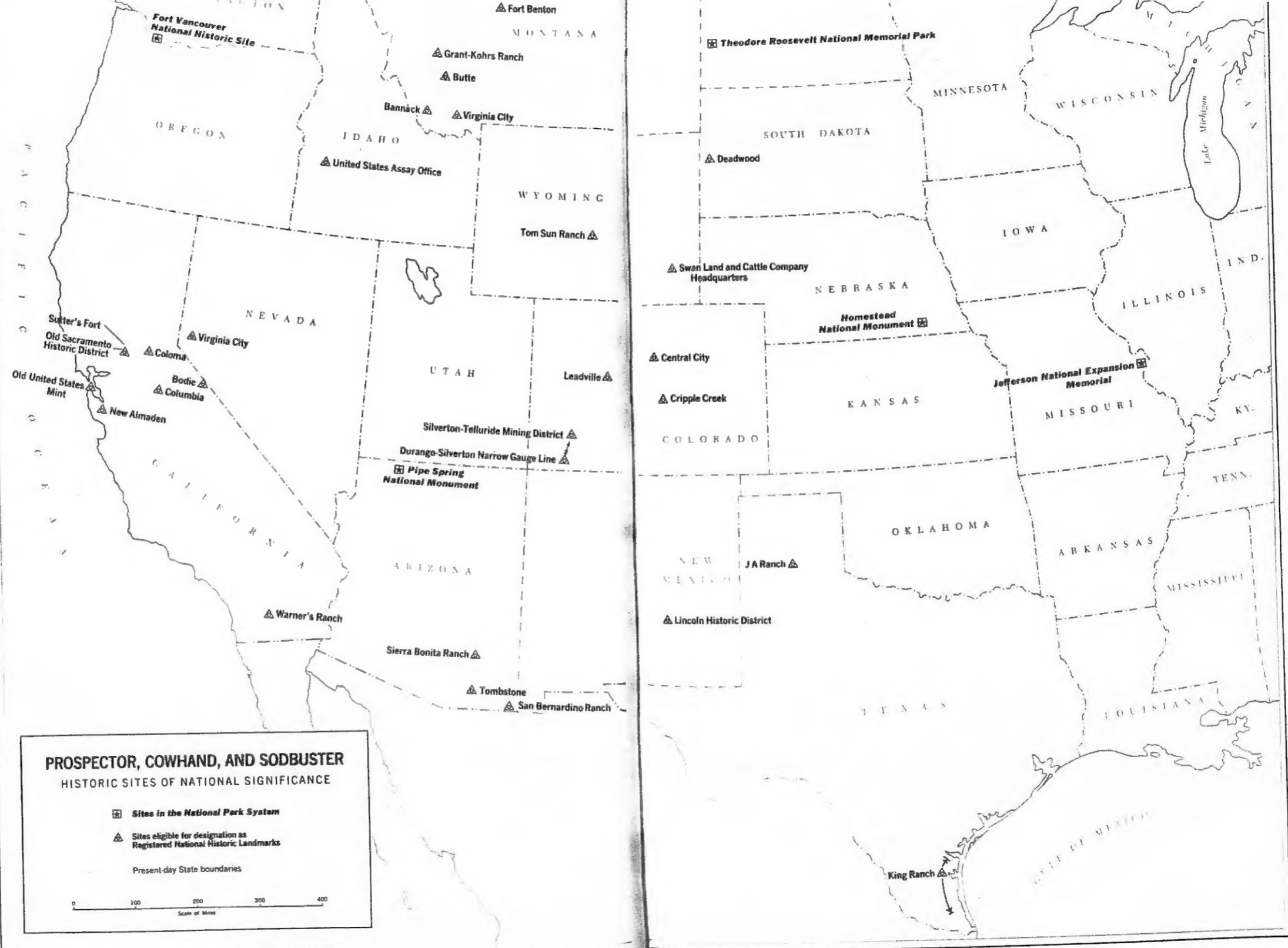
Sutter's sawmill at Coloma, California, near which James Marshall discovered gold in 1848 and stirred the Nation. From a painting by Charles C. Nahl. Courtesy, Bancroft Library, University of California.

had virtually ended their business anyway—and joined the rush. The line of settlement, which for the most part had stopped at the edge of the Plains, leaped across the deserts and mountains to the golden valleys of the Sacramento River.

Before long, the mining frontier worked its way eastward into the mineral-rich mountains from the Sierra to the Rockies. The cattlemen's empire, born in Texas at the close of the Civil War, rolled north and west to cover the Great Plains, spill over the mountains to upland plateaus, and even finger onto Southwestern deserts. At about the same time the sod house frontier of the Plains came into being. Settlers staked out the river valleys, cross-hatched the deserts with irrigation ditches, and crowded the cattlemen with whole sections of dry-land crops.

Not all those who rushed west went to the goldfields. Such an exploding population had to be fed, housed, entertained, and provided with other economic necessities. Thus mining created business, stimulated farming and ranching, fostered the west coast fishing industry, enhanced the market for lumber, spurred the establishment and growth of cities, and hastened the construction of roads and railroads.

Yet of all those who played a part in the settlement of the West,



souri, and Mexico rushed in. In 1861, however, Apaches forced the miners to abandon the site. Mining nearly ceased in New Mexico Territory during the Civil War, and for some time after the war transportation problems and the Indian hazard had an inhibiting effect. A silver boom occurred in the late 1870's, when several mining towns sprang up in the southern hills.

Isolation, the Apache danger, the lack of water, the predominance of base metals unsuited to simple milling, and the failure of prospectors to make any big strikes precluded any extensive mining in New Mexico until the 20th century, when uranium, oil, and natural gas became major sources of income.

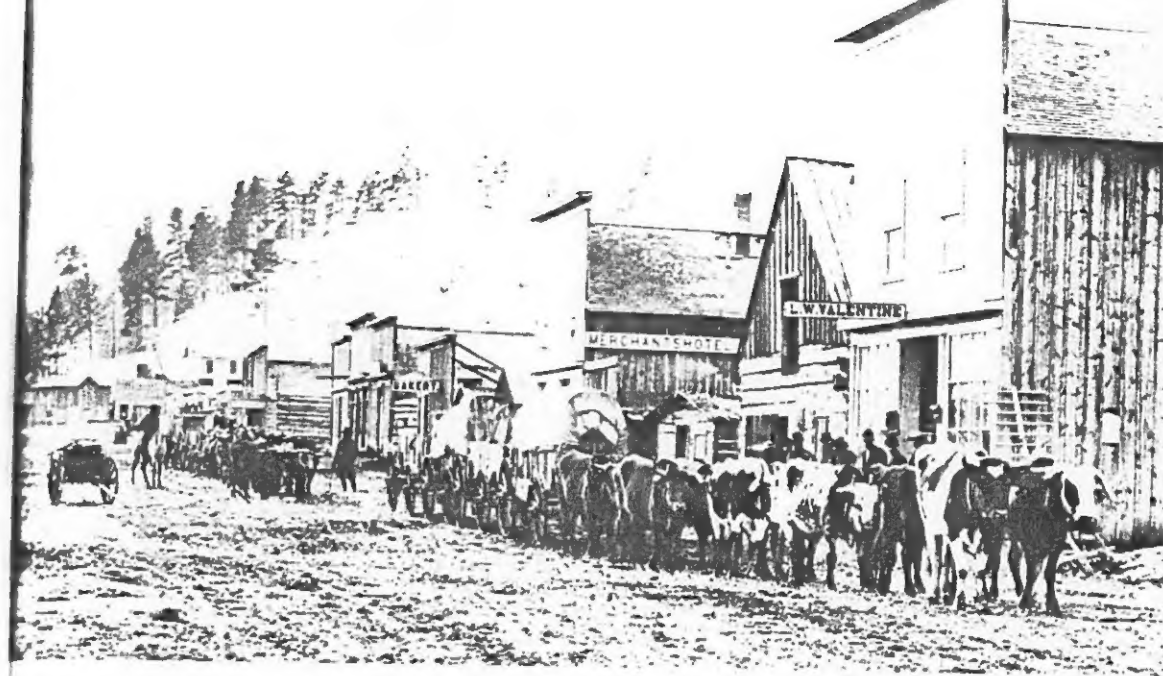
#### WYOMING—LESSER STRIKES

Wyoming was another region where a major boom did not occur, though prospectors made a few small strikes. In the early 1860's they discovered gold in the Big Horn country, and for a few years this region attracted some miners from Montana. In 1867 a rush to the Sweetwater River region occurred, during which South Pass City and Atlantic City were founded. The boom ended quickly, however, for the pockets proved shallow. By 1870 the miners had left the Territory. Some prospecting continued during the 1870's and 1880's, but the people of Wyoming had long since turned their attention to the cattle industry.

#### THE BLACK HILLS—OPENING THE SIOUX COUNTRY

By the early 1870's only one region of the West had escaped the prospector's pick—the Black Hills of Dakota, a region occupied by the Sioux Indians and guarded by troops who barred all white men from the area. Tales were recounted of Indians who came from the Black Hills to Fort Laramie with nuggets of pure gold; of military commanders who suppressed news of gold discoveries to prevent wholesale desertions; and of Father De Smet, the pioneer Jesuit missionary who had obtained gold from the Indians before the discovery in California and warned them not to reveal this secret if they wished to retain their hunting grounds.

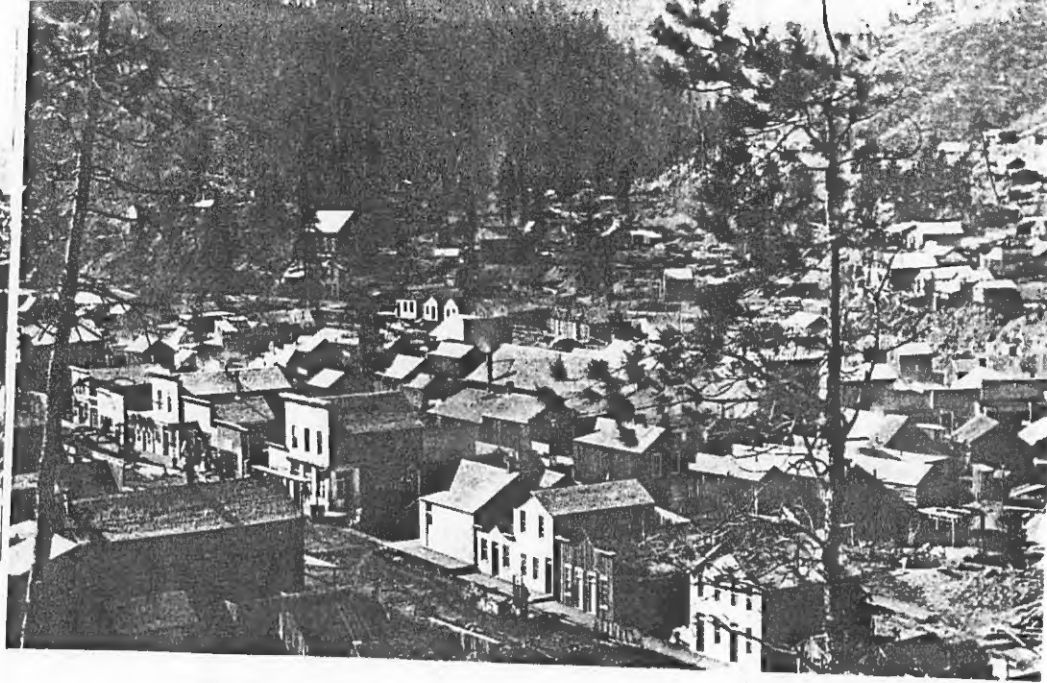
In 1867 more substantial proof of the riches of the Black Hills was forthcoming. A report concerning the mineral resources east of



Bull freighters arriving in Crook City, Black Hills, 1877. Pierre, Dakota Territory, was the Missouri River port of entry for the Black Hills mining region. Freighters also operated from Bismarck and other Missouri River points to interior settlements. Photograph by F. Jay Haynes. Courtesy, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and The Haynes Foundation.

the Rocky Mountains, drawn up at the order of the Secretary of the Treasury, was published. Asserting that explorations by Lt. G. K. Warren in 1857 and Capt. W. F. Reynolds in 1859 and 1860 had verified that the Black Hills were rich in gold and silver, as well as iron, coal, and copper, it stated: "With the pacification of the Sioux Indians and the establishment of emigrant roads, this district of Dakota would doubtless be the scene of great mining excitement, as the goldfield of the Black Hills is accessible at a distance of 120 miles from the Missouri River."

By the early 1870's, when the mines of the West were passing from the hands of the prospectors to those of Eastern capitalists, increasing pressures were brought to bear on the Government to open the Black Hills to prospecting. More and more gold seekers began congregating just outside the forbidden area. Alarmed at this buildup, the Government in 1874 organized a military expedition under Gen. George A. Custer, accompanied by a group of



Deadwood Gulch, South Dakota Territory, in 1877. One of the last great mining strikes was made at Deadwood, whose name is synonymous with "Wild Bill" Hickok and Calamity Jane. Many buildings from the town's heyday have survived. Photograph by F. Jay Haynes. Courtesy, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and The Haynes Foundation.

scientists, to explore the mineral resources of the region. Custer reported that gold was present in the Black Hills in profitable amounts.

The news caused gold seekers from all over the West to jam into adjacent towns, such as Bismarck, Cheyenne, and Sioux City, and loudly demand that the region be opened to miners. Many clandestinely slipped into the Black Hills, and the Army kept busy ejecting them. In 1875, after a special commission failed to obtain any concessions from the Indians, the Government, foreseeing the inevitable and unable to control the situation indefinitely, threw open the Black Hills to anyone who was willing to accept the risks involved. Nearly 15,000 miners entered the region in the next few months. They provided one of the causes of the Sioux uprising in 1876, highlighted by the annihilation of Custer's force at the Little Bighorn. In 1877 the Sioux were forced to cede the Black Hills.

The objective of the first group of prospectors in the Black Hills was French Creek, where they laid out Custer City. Then in the fall of 1875 a party of gold seekers made one of the last great strikes of the mining frontier at Deadwood Gulch. The town that grew up nearby took its name from the gulch and there the mining frontier reached its zenith. It was as wild as any in the West. The placers at Deadwood, and nearby Lead, brought fortunes to many prospectors. But the surface deposits were quickly exhausted. To extract precious metal from the quartz, heavily capitalized companies, such as the Homestake, took over, and the colorful, highly individualistic era of the prospector and placer miner came to an end in the Black Hills. With the Deadwood boom, the eastward movement of the mining frontier ended.



Wells-Fargo guards escort a gold shipment out of Deadwood, Dakota Territory. Photograph by John C. H. Grabill. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

Territory. In 1863, when Congress created the Idaho Territory, the Washington Territory assumed the present boundaries of the State. Washington did not achieve statehood until 1889.

At the time of the 1860 gold rush to Idaho, it was a part of the Washington Territory. The miners soon clamored for separate Territorial status. They argued that the seat of government of the Washington Territory was too far west and that of the Dakotas too far east. Because of the development of mining and the growing agricultural population, in 1863 Congress authorized Idaho Territory, which included present Idaho, Montana, and most of Wyoming.

Because the Idaho government had difficulty in administering the eastern regions of the Territory, Congress received petitions from the mining camps there sympathetically and in 1864 created Montana Territory. Four years later it founded Wyoming Territory—more because of the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad across its breadth and the establishment of Cheyenne as an important railroad junction than the influence of miners. With the building of the railroads, the influx of population, and the growth of mining and ranching, the Territories of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho grew rapidly. Congress admitted Montana to the Union as a State in 1889, and Idaho and Wyoming in 1890.

The Dakota Territory, created in 1861, included present North and South Dakota and much of Wyoming and Montana until 1863, when Congress founded Idaho Territory, which absorbed all of present Montana and much of Wyoming. When the Montana Territory was established in 1864, the latter area reverted to the Dakota Territory. In 1868 Congress created the Wyoming Territory and reduced the Dakota Territory to the region comprising present North and South Dakota. At that time the Black Hills region was Indian territory. When prospectors struck gold there in 1874, a rush of miners occurred. They inaugurated a drive for statehood. In 1889 Congress established the States of North and South Dakota.

### *The Open Range Cattle Era*

For several generations the cowboy has been a favorite among American folk heroes. He has been romanticized and glorified. In

the process his fictional and television images have obscured the major contributions of the open range cattle industry to the development of the West.

### TEXAS ORIGINS

The cattlemen's empire of the post-Civil War period had its origins deep in south Texas in a triangle bounded by the cities of San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Laredo. Nature seemingly had endowed this region with the specific resources for raising cattle. The climate was mild, the grass grew tall, and predatory animals were few. Northward lay a vast expanse of grassland awaiting occupation; it was guarded only by the Indians, who in a sense were tending their own herds—the buffalo.



The vast buffalo herds that ranged over the Plains supported the Indian economy. As the buffalo hunters completed their work, U.S. Army troops forced the Indians onto reservations. Shown here is part of the herd maintained today at Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park.

The establishment of the Texas missions by the Spaniards, beginning in 1716, marked the first effort to raise cattle in the province. By 1770 the ranches of Mission La Bahía del Espíritu Santo, near Goliad, were running perhaps 40,000 Longhorns between the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers. Soon the cattle constituted the principal wealth of the missions and of most of the private citizens in the province, who made long drives from Texas to Louisiana and Coahuila. In south Texas sheep increased more slowly than cattle because the area was thickly wooded and because of the shortage of trained herders.

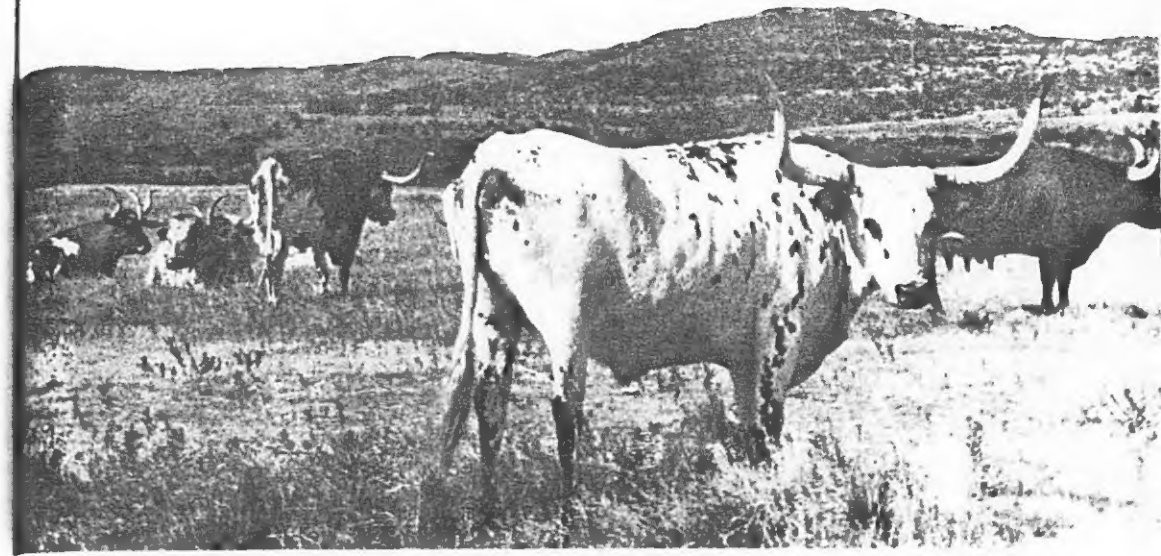
The Spanish also introduced Longhorns into present Arizona and New Mexico at an early date, but because of the less suitable environment no significant development of the cattle industry occurred in the region until after the Civil War. In California, where Longhorns also prevailed, ranching was the basis of the economy during the Spanish and Mexican periods, but it played no real part in the development of the cattlemen's empire in the American West.

#### LONGHORNS: THE BASIC STOCK

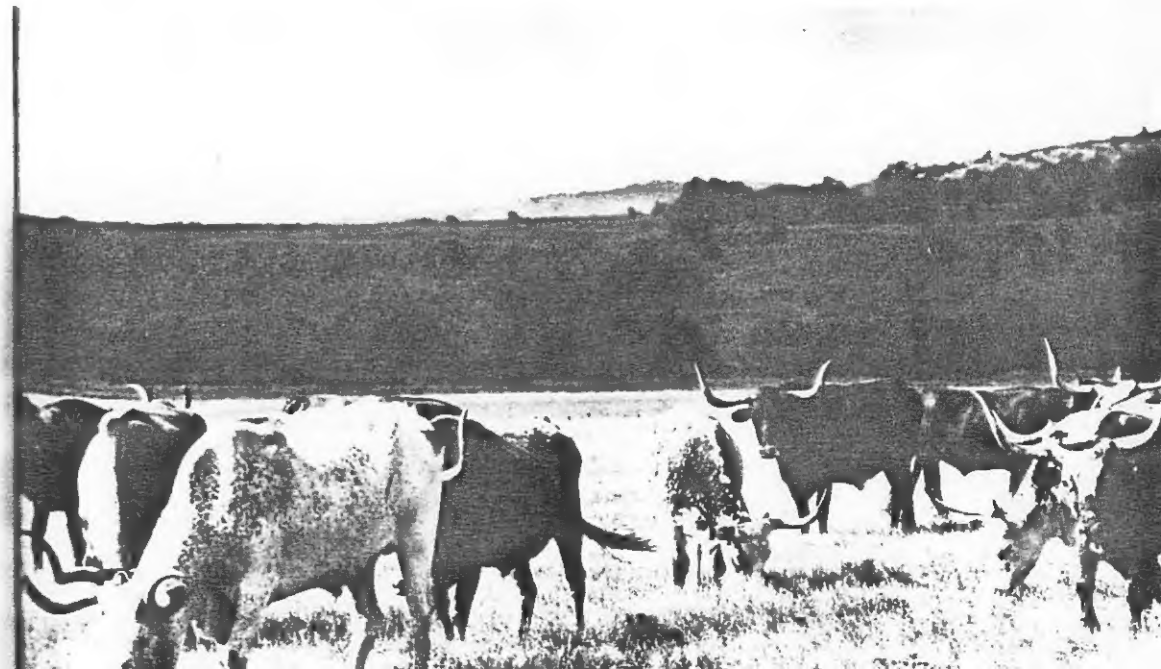
The Longhorn, more a type than a breed, first stocked the ranges in what is now the United States. Despite his nondescript color, coarse and stringy meat, and wild nature, he was of distinguished ancestry. He was a direct descendant of the unseemly, lanky animals that had been reared for so long in Spain by the Moors on the plains of Andalusia.

Early American settlers in Texas considered the Longhorns to be indigenous wild animals like the buffalo. They called them "mustang cattle," "Spanish cattle," or simply "wild cattle." The cattle brought by the settlers from the Eastern United States interbred with the Longhorns. The result was an animal slightly different than the original Longhorn: the horns were longer, the body heavier and rangier, and the color variations unlimited. By the Civil War period the words "Texas cattle" and "Longhorns" had come to be synonymous.

Cowboys declared that the wiry Longhorn steer, despite his perversity and independence, was the most likely animal for trail driving that nature ever produced. They claimed that the long-legged



Vast herds of Longhorns, driven north from Texas, once grazed Western ranges. Pictured here are Longhorns at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, near Cache, Oklahoma. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains another herd at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, Valentine, Nebraska. Courtesy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



animals had tougher hooves, more endurance, and the ability to range farther without water than the cattle of improved blood—the “high grade stuff” of a later period. A natural-born “rustler,” the Longhorn seemed to thrive on the trail. He walked tirelessly over great distances, seemingly unaffected by heat, hunger, or the unmelodious songs of the nightriders. And above all he could walk 60 miles between waterings. These virtues compensated in part for the distressing inability of the breed to produce beef in quantity or quality.

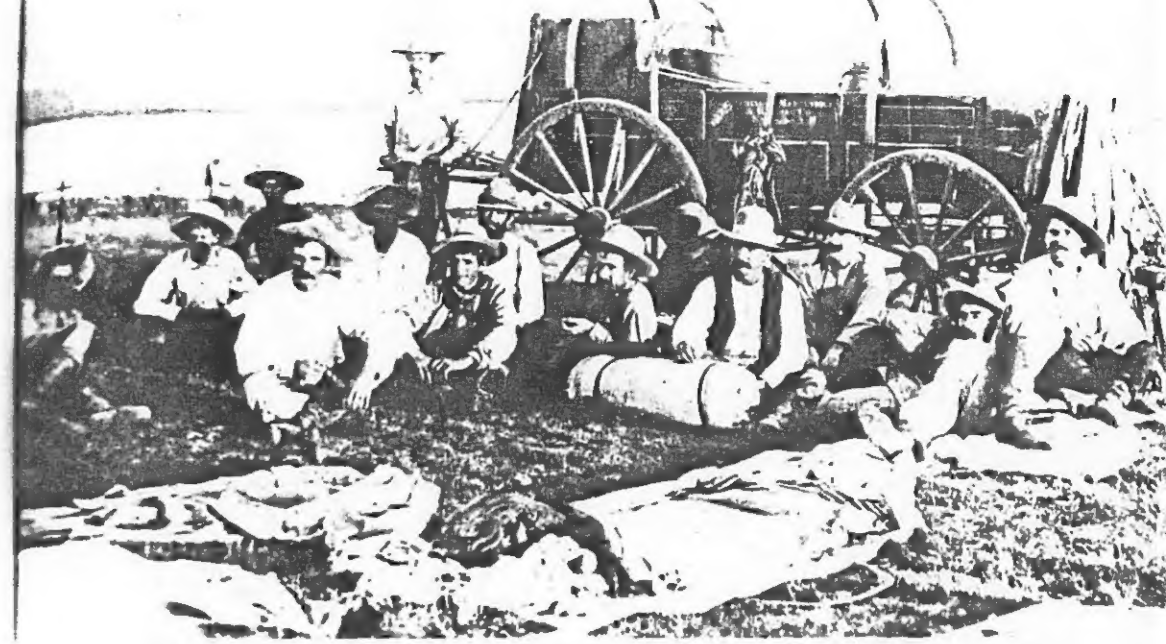
#### THE SPANISH MUSTANG

Another important contribution of the Spaniards to the cattle industry was the mustang, which, like Spanish cattle, soon had a better hold on U.S. soil than the Spaniard himself. This horse, whose bloodlines were strong like the Longhorn, was descended from stock brought into Spain from North Africa by the Moors. After the Spanish brought the mustangs to the Southwest, some of them strayed, multiplied, and formed wild herds that eventually ranged onto the Great Plains. The Indians preferred stealing from the Spaniards to catching the fleet-footed, untamed animals on the prairies.

The Texas *vaquero*, or cowboy, found the mustang a natural-born cow horse. Of scrubby appearance and slight stature, the horse had been radically changed by the Spanish. What he lost in beauty, he gained in wind and bottom. When the American cowboy first came to know him, he was a wiry, fleet, untamed little brute who could run all day and still kick his rider's hat off at night. Through selective breeding and the admixture of some imported blood, in the course of time he became larger and somewhat more tractable.

#### OTHER SPANISH CONTRIBUTIONS

The Spaniards provided almost all the ingredients of the open range cattle era, except for grass and water. Besides the Longhorn and the mustang, the hackamore, or *jaquima*, was also Spanish in origin, as were the lariat, or *la riata*, the sombrero, and the chaps, or *chaparejos*. The so-called Texas saddle, almost in its present



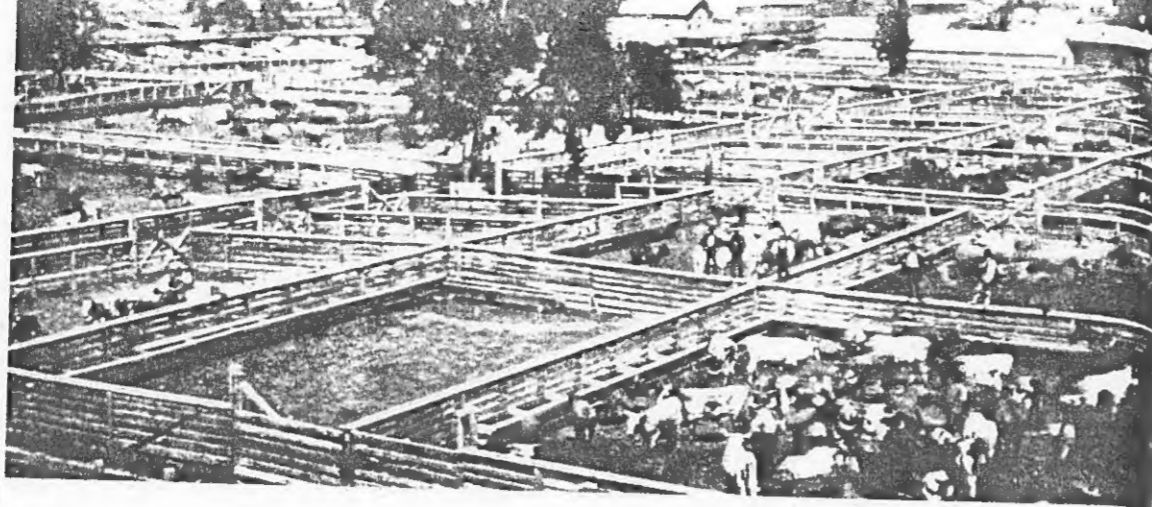
Range crew on the Pecos River, New Mexico Territory. Courtesy, Museum of New Mexico.

form, was introduced into Spain by the Moors. Finally, Spain perfected the techniques of handling cattle on horseback.

#### SEEKING A MARKET

At the conclusion of the Texas Revolution, most Mexican ranchers in south Texas abandoned their property—including cattle—and hurried southward to avoid the vengeance of the Texans. The new republic promptly declared all unbranded stock to be public property. Impoverished Texas pioneers who provided themselves with a good supply of branding irons and wielded them with vigor were soon on the way to becoming cattle barons. But Texas had insufficient markets for the cattle.

Before the Civil War the largest single market was New Orleans, reached both overland and by water, although the overland route was the more popular. In 1853 alone an estimated 40,000 head crossed the Nueces River en route to New Orleans. The California gold rush provided a new market. In the early 1850's cowboys drove thousands of Longhorns, worth \$5 to \$15 a head in Texas, across the desert to California, where they brought up to \$150 each. The enormous difficulties encountered on the long drive to California, however, prevented it from becoming a major market.



Kansas City Stockyards in 1872, the second year of operation. Varicolored Texas Longhorns, forwarded from railhead cowtowns over the Kansas Pacific Railroad, await shipment to Chicago and other points. Courtesy, Kansas City Stockyards Company.

Another small but promising market became apparent in the frontier towns, mainly in Missouri, where parties bound over the Oregon Trail outfitted. Texans drove herds of cattle northward and then sold them to local butchers, Chicago and Kansas City meatpackers, and the commissary department of the U.S. Army. In 1854 about 50,000 head of Longhorns crossed the Red River. But these markets were irregular and minor ones. Much better ones had to be found.

Then came the Civil War, and Texas cowboys dropped their branding irons and took up shooting irons. While they were at war, the Longhorns increased to about 5 million head. At the same time the cities of the North, rapidly expanding and becoming industrialized because of the wartime boom, were hungry for meat. When Texans returned from the war, they found their Confederate currency worthless and their economy wrecked. But they did have beef—worth only a few dollars a head, or even free to anyone who was willing to go out and pound it up—but beef that would bring \$40 a head in Northern and Eastern markets, with which Texas had no rail connections. The \$4 steers had to be connected with the \$40 markets.

Such a connection was facilitated by various trends in the last half of the 19th century: The removal of the buffalo and the Plains Indians; the extension of the railroads across the West; and

increased demand for meat. This demand was not only in the cities of the East, which resulted in the burgeoning of the Chicago and Kansas City meatpacking industries and the development of the refrigerator car, but also in mining areas, U.S. Army posts, Indian reservations, and railroad construction gangs in the West.

#### THE GREAT DRIVES

In the spring of 1866 a few Texas ranchers drove herds of Longhorns northward over the Shawnee Trail. Their objective was Sedalia, Mo., the railhead for Eastern and Northern markets. But the first year of the "long drive" was nearly the last. Not yet experienced in trail driving, the cowboys found the half-wild cattle difficult to manage. Armed mobs of angry Missouri farmers, halting the drives at county lines, shot at and stampeded the cattle for fear that the herds would infect their own animals with the dreaded Texas fever.

It was Joseph G. McCoy who made perhaps the most important single contribution to the range cattle industry. This young, audacious cattle dealer found an effective way to bring Texas cattle to market. In 1867, when the Kansas Pacific Railroad reached Abilene, a few Texans began to drive herds there. McCoy, recognizing the economic potential of the Texas cattle drives, established shipping facilities at Abilene. He did so because he felt that it was the farthest point east that would be practicable and because it was well watered and had a good supply of grass.

Jesse Chisholm, half-breed Cherokee trader, founded the route across Indian Territory into Kansas that became a famous cattle trail, the Chisholm Trail. Courtesy, Oklahoma Historical Society.



McCoy finally persuaded the railroad that his plan was sound, and he spent the summer of 1867 building stockyards, pens, and loading chutes. He advertised the market throughout Texas and sent his agents into Kansas and Indian Territory (in present Oklahoma) to guide the trail herds to Abilene. After crossing the Red River the cowboys followed the broad trail that Jesse Chisholm, a half-breed Cherokee Indian trader, had used earlier on trading expeditions and had freshly marked while guiding a military expedition that was removing about 3,000 Wichita Indians from Kansas to a new location along the Red River. Thus was born the Chisholm Trail.

In 1867 only 35,000 head of cattle reached Abilene, but a new era had begun. Returning drovers spread the word throughout Texas of the ease with which cattle could be driven to Abilene and pointed out that few settlements, wooded areas, or angry farmers would be encountered along the way. In the next 4 years more than a million head of Texas cattle were loaded at Abilene and shipped to Chicago and Kansas City packinghouses or as feeders to Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Illinois farms for fattening on corn. Then the advancing farmers' frontier made it necessary to shift the long drive westward once again. Newton and Wichita, on

Pile of 40,000 buffalo hides awaiting shipment in Dodge City, Kansas, to Eastern markets. As the buffalo hunters wrought destruction on the Plains, they destroyed the Indian way of life but opened the way for the farming and ranching frontiers. Courtesy, Kansas Historical Society.



the Santa Fe Railway, became the major termini of the drive.

The next major trail to develop was the Great Western, or more simply, the Western. Its railhead was Ogallala, Nebr., served by the Union Pacific Railroad, and by 1876 the Western had supplanted the Chisholm Trail as the major northward artery of cattle traffic. By 1880 Dodge City, south of Ogallala and located on the Santa Fe Railway, had replaced Ogallala as the major railhead of the Western Trail. But the latter city was used until 1895, and the trail was extended northward into Montana, for cattlemen had discovered that cattle could survive northern winters. Ranching was spreading, and Texas no longer was the major source of range beef for the Nation.

Despite evidence to the contrary, most Texas ranchers had long refused to believe that cattle could survive the cold winters on the northern Plains or in the mountains. Mining communities of the 1850's and 1860's in the widely separated mountain districts of the West had drawn cattlemen and sheepmen to supply meat. These ranchers usually operated on a small scale and supplied a limited market. Large-scale freighting companies that supplied the necessities of life for the miners and the Army had also brought animals West and wintered them along the overland routes. For example, during the winter of 1857-58 the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell wintered some 15,000 head just south of the Oregon Trail.

Colorado also served as proof, for it early became a center of the cattle industry—partly as a result of the Pike's Peak mining boom that began in 1858 and partly as a result of the gradual extension northward of Texas ranches. In 1866 Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, two Texas drovers and ranchers, founded another major trail, the Goodnight-Loving. They trailed large herds from Fort Belknap, in Texas, into Colorado Territory via Fort Sumner, New Mexico Territory. And in 1868 Goodnight delivered a trail herd to Cheyenne, the second Texas herd to arrive in Wyoming, to feed the army of workers on the Union Pacific Railroad.

With the arrival of the Kansas Pacific Railroad late in the 1860's, ranchers in eastern Colorado Territory could ship cattle to the Eastern market or drive them to the ranges in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming—where the nucleus of a cattle industry had already been established to satisfy local markets such as miners, overland



## PROSPECTOR, COWHAND, AND SODBUSTER

HISTORIC SITES OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Sites in the National Park System

Sites eligible for designation as Registered National Historic Landmarks

Present-day State boundaries

King Ranch

